

Factsheet: The Importance of Bristol Bay's Salmon Fishery

Question: Why is the Bristol Bay salmon fishery so valuable to Alaskans and the rest of the Nation?

Answer:

- Bristol Bay produces (on average) almost half of the world's sockeye salmon (30 million fish/year).
- The Bristol Bay's Kvichak River (on average) produces more sockeye salmon than any other river in the world.
- The Bristol Bay's Nushagak River is the 4th largest producer of chinook salmon in North America and produces chinook runs that are periodically at or near the world's largest which is remarkable considering its relatively small watershed area.
- The fishery in Bristol Bay is robust and intact, compared to the western US, where 29% of salmon populations are extinct and another third are threatened or endangered.
- The economic value of Bristol Bay's 2010 sockeye salmon was \$148.7 million for harvest and \$369.8 million for production (amounts paid to fishermen and processors respectively).
- The Bristol Bay salmon fishery annually employs over 10,000 people in fishing and fish processing. (In 2009, there were 6,798 employed in salmon fishing and 4,522 employed in fish processing).
- In 2009, approximately \$50 million was spent in Alaska by nonresidents specifically for the purpose of sport fishing in the Bristol Bay region (12,500 fishing trips).
- The Bristol Bay Watershed is the ancestral home to 31 Alaska Native Tribes and still provides the same level of ecosystem services that it has for over 4000 years.
- Subsistence fishing and hunting, of numerous species of fish, mammals and birds dependent on the river and lake system, continues to provide native people with up to 80% of their protein, and up to and in some cases surpassing 300 pounds of food per person annually.
- Salmon account for 52% of the subsistence harvest in Bristol Bay (31% of the harvest is from mammals and 10% is from non-salmon fish).

Background:

- Nine federally recognized tribes have petitioned EPA to take action to protect Bristol Bay's salmon populations. Their request has been echoed by a broad coalition of stakeholders including fisherman, seafood processors, hunters and anglers, chefs and restaurant owners, jewelry companies, members of the faith community, elected officials and the public from across Alaska and the rest of the country.
- They have expressed concern that the significant Bristol Bay salmon fishery would be at risk from large-scale mining.
- EPA is coordinating with federal, state, and local partners to conduct a comprehensive scientific analysis of the Bristol Bay watershed to better understand how future large-scale mining may affect water quality and the Bristol Bay salmon fishery.
- EPA will use the results of this assessment to evaluate options for assuring that the resources of Bristol Bay, upon which the salmon fishery depends, are effectively protected.